

Clarios workers defiant as support grows for solidarity action by all autoworkers to win crucial strike

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Are you a Clarios worker? Fill out the form at the end of the article or text 419-491-7478 to get more information about forming a rank-and-file strike committee to expand the fight.

The strike by 525 workers at the Clarios auto battery factory in the Toledo suburb of Holland, Ohio is nearing the end of its third week. Workers are more determined than ever to win substantial pay increases after years of declining wages and to beat back the company's demands for 12-hour shifts without overtime pay (the "2-2-3 schedule").

Earlier this week, striking workers decisively rejected a second contract backed by the United Auto Workers (UAW), which was essentially the same as the first and written by corporate management.

The defiant stand by the Clarios workers—against both the company and the UAW bureaucracy—has struck a powerful chord among rank-and-file workers at GM, Ford and Stellantis, all of whom face a crucial contract battle in September.

The Big Three automakers are backing Clarios and want the company to deliver a decisive defeat to the striking workers. On the other hand, there is a growing recognition among Big Three autoworkers that a victory at Clarios will immensely strengthen them. This has led many workers to demand that the UAW impose a ban on the handling of scab batteries, which are being produced by the strikebreakers the company has brought into the Holland plant after obtaining a court injunction restricting picketing to five workers at each gate.

On the picket lines Thursday afternoon, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters saw several trucks crossing in and out of the factory. According to striking workers, the batteries are being shipped to Ford, GM, Stellantis and other auto factories.

"They make so much about us being qualified, trained and certified to do this work," one worker said. "But now they have scabs who don't know what they're making. They're being shipped to the Ford Dearborn Truck Plant and GM plants in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, Flint and other cities."

Another worker added, "Nobody in the union should be handling these batteries, from here or any other Clarios plant. If that stopped, we would win fast. We're staying strong, but it's time for all autoworkers to be united."

The striking workers explained why they voted down the second contract proposal on Monday, which the UAW International and Local 12 officials tried to get passed in a snap vote less than an hour after releasing a few selected details of the deal.

"After we voted down the first contract by 98 percent, the local had a meeting and asked us what we didn't like. We told them. Then they came back with another contract proposal, and we looked at it and voted it down again. They just put lipstick on a pig. It was the same contract we voted down, except with a little higher signing bonus to get us to take it. It included the 2-2-3 schedule. The union said they put a 'box' around it by limiting it to one department. But in five years, everybody could be on it.

"Local 12 had another meeting after we voted it down to ask us what we didn't like this time. A lot of workers didn't show up. They know the union is not listening to us."

Another worker added, "We want fair pay and health insurance and to keep our overtime after eight hours. We had that for years, so why are they trying to take it away now? We also took two pay cuts. We said, 'No. Enough is enough.'

"The economy is going down. We're not going to take any more pay cuts. We want set rates. We have to stay

together and stay strong.”

Addressing himself to autoworkers at GM, Ford and Stellantis, he said, “It is not the time to give more. We’re fighting for the future, for our kids. We all have to stick together.”

Another worker expressed the same sentiment. “We all have to stick together and not back down. The workers at the Big Three plants, at Jeep and Ford, they have enormous power. Clarios is run by an investment firm, and all they think about is their money. But if they beat us, they’re coming for all the autoworkers next.”

At the Stellantis Warren Truck Plant, rank-and-file workers forced UAW Local 140 officials to admit that Clarios batteries, with Stellantis’ Mopar labels, were being put inside the Ram 1500 pickup trucks at the plant.

Several workers confronted the local union officials about this on the local’s Facebook page. After first dodging the questions and falsely claiming that no Clarios batteries were being used, union officials finally admitted that the batteries were being used but did not call for a ban on handling them.

This is consistent with the policy of the entire UAW apparatus, now led by President Shawn Fain. Despite his claims that the UAW leaders are “100 percent behind the Clarios workers,” Fain is continuing to undermine the Clarios workers by permitting the Big Three automakers to build their vehicles with batteries from the strikebound plant.

In contrast, rank-and-file workers at the plant enthusiastically supported the strike and called for joint action in comments to WSWs reporters Thursday afternoon.

A young temporary part-time worker (TPT) said, “I think the Clarios workers should stand in unity, that is what the union is supposed to be for. Don’t let them low-ball you and treat you less than you deserve. This is the same fight we have here. All the TPTs should be rolled over [to full time]. We’re at the bottom of the barrel. With the cost of inflation, we are barely even making it.”

Addressing herself to the Clarios strikers, a veteran worker added, “Stand tough. We are behind you. If they do good by them, it will be better for us, come September. The companies are making billions, and we’re making change. It is not fair, the two tiers, the three tiers. We all hired in here. We all do the same exact jobs. We all should get a fair wage. And the wages they are paying are not even enough to live on.”

Commenting on the fact that the UAW brought back a contract that forced Clarios workers to work 12 hours

without overtime after eight hours, she said, “That’s not right. It should be eight and the gate. I agree with them, they should stand tall.” She concluded, “We shouldn’t be building with those [Clarios batteries]. If you are a scab, we don’t want your product.”

A WSWs reporting team also spoke to striking workers at the Constellium plant 30 miles south of Detroit, which manufactures aluminum frames, engine rails and other critical parts for the highly profitable Ford line of pickups. The 160 workers at the plant, members of UAW Local 174, have been on strike since May 17. Like Clarios workers, the strikers at Constellium are fighting exhausting and dangerous work schedules and the erosion of their paychecks by inflation.

“You have to work 40 hours before you get any overtime,” one worker said, “and weekends are mandatory.” The company is headquartered in Paris, France and many workers were aware of the mass protests and strikes that have gripped that country in response to President Macron’s attack on pensions. “I can’t wait until the general strikes get here,” one worker stated.

Another added, “Everything keeps going up, and wages stay the same. We’re in the same boat as the Clarios strike. If the Ford workers would say, ‘We don’t want any of your scab parts, we’d be back to work tomorrow.’”

The UAW bureaucracy is working with the companies and the Biden administration to carry out the transition to electric vehicles at the expense of workers’ jobs, living standards and working conditions.

That is why the fight to defend the Clarios and Constellium workers requires the building of rank-and-file strike support committees to spread information about the strikes, inform workers of what is at stake and ensure that no worker handles scab parts. This must be discussed by workers at every plant and on every shop floor in connection with preparing rank-and-file organizations for the fight in September.



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